

## Education Notes

# Employment Outlook for the Handicapped

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**I**F THE WORD "handicap" is defined broadly to include any limitations on normal physical and mental health, then nearly all of us have some handicap.

In the U.S. National Health Survey in 1957-59, the Public Health Service found that more than 40 percent of the American population were suffering from one or more chronic conditions of illness, while a total of 10 percent of the entire population had some degree of activity limitation because of these chronic conditions. Furthermore, while the figures for young people under the age of 25 showed chronic conditions in only 21 percent of that age group, the figure for age 45-64 was nearly 60 percent, and for 65 years of age and over it was about 77 percent. This survey shows that a degree of activity limitation amounted to more than 16 percent in the group aged 45-64 years and more than 42 percent in the group 65 years and over.

It appears that in our current population there may be nearly 11 million people who might experience employment handicaps because of their physical condition.

Furthermore, the figures above do not include persons injured in various ways. Statistics from the survey showed that nearly one-fourth of the U.S. population suffered some kind of accident during a 2-year period, counting accidents at home, at work, in motor vehicles, or in other ways. Of course, many of these accidents were so minor that they may have had a purely temporary effect upon a person's health or working ability.

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*Dr. Clague is commissioner of labor statistics, U.S. Department of Labor. This statement is based on a talk given before conferees on Heuristic Hypotheses About the Variant Child in Our Culture, at the Woods School, Langhorne, Pa., May 17, 1961.*

However, it has been estimated by the Bureau of Labor Statistics that in the past 5 years (1956-60), an average of approximately 82,000 persons have experienced permanently disabling work injuries in each year. In our present population of working age, therefore, there are about 1.5 million people who have permanent physical impairments of some degree arising from their employment. Many of these, of course, are minor impairments and have little or no effect upon employability. But the existence of these impairments must be taken into account in some degree in placement of these persons in jobs.

Since so many of us are impaired or partially disabled in some form or other, and in some degree or other, many of us must be doing quite well despite our handicaps. The significant point here is that while a handicap may operate to limit or circumscribe one's opportunities, it may be no disadvantage at all in other directions. In fact, as in the case of a deaf person in a noisy factory, it may be a positive advantage. So, too, a person almost completely disabled for heavy physical work may be well qualified for certain kinds of desk work in an office.

So far, mental handicaps have not been mentioned. These are found in many different forms. Little is known about the adaptation of mental handicaps to job opportunities, but it is at least possible to infer that there are possibilities of finding job opportunities in which the mental handicap is of minor importance or even nonexistent.

The changing pattern of American industry has many profound implications for handicapped persons.

Based upon statistical projections by the U.S. Department of Labor for the decade of the 1960's, we expect a more rapid increase in

the Nation's labor force, both men and women, both old and young, in the 1960's than we have had since World War II. This means that jobs in general may be somewhat harder to find than they have been within the recent experience.

Second, a gradual upward trend is indicated in the more highly skilled occupations. For example, the occupational group showing the fastest growth at the present time is the professional and technical group. This includes not only the professions, but also the sub-professions and the technicians who support them. It is estimated that this group may increase as much as 40 percent within the next 10 years. Likewise, we foresee substantial increases in white-collar occupations generally, in clerical and sales occupations especially, as well as in the skilled trades and in managerial and administrative occupations. Conversely, we foresee an actual decline in farming occupations, both farmers and farm laborers. Nor is there any increase in sight in the unskilled labor occupations in industry. Even in many of the service occupations associated with the growth of the population, such as hotel and restaurant employees, barbers and hairdressers, or recreational workers, we do not foresee rapid growth.

This prospective shift in the Nation's occupational structure bears heavily upon plans for education and training. There has been a steady increase in the degree of education acquired by successive generations of American workers. More youngsters are going to high school, more are graduating from high school, more are going to college, and more are doing graduate work. The average educational level is increasing.

Nevertheless, the shift in occupational needs may be occurring faster than the educational advances. We have estimated that about 26 million new young workers will enter the labor force in the 1960's. Among them there are likely to be about 30 percent who will have only a grade school education or a few years of high school. In the light of the educational requirements for professional, technical, managerial, skilled, and clerical jobs, it is a question of whether these under-educated workers

will qualify for jobs in those fields. On the other hand, the outlook for unskilled and common labor jobs, including unskilled service jobs, portends a declining labor market for uneducated and untrained youngsters. They may have trouble finding job opportunities, and they may have additional trouble in holding jobs which they do obtain.

We have already seen some evidence of this in the studies conducted by the Bureau of Labor Statistics on high school dropouts in seven communities. In summary, they indicate the sharpest kinds of contrast between those who graduated from high school and those who dropped out without graduating.

Nearly half of the boy graduates were in skilled or semiskilled jobs as compared with about a third of the boy dropouts. Only 3 percent of the boy graduates were earning less than \$40 a week compared with 15 percent of the dropouts. Approximately one-third of the boy graduates were earning \$80 or more a week compared with about one-fifth of the boy dropouts.

About two-thirds of the girl graduates found jobs in offices while the majority of girl dropouts found jobs as waitresses or engaged in other unskilled work. Half of the girl graduates were earning \$50 or more a week compared with about one-sixth of the girl dropouts.

Graduates and dropouts experienced sharply different amounts of unemployment. Dropouts had two to three times the amount of unemployment as graduates. This was true of both boys and girls.

### Summary

There is a rising trend in jobs that require education and training. At the same time, the shift of white-collar and office jobs may enhance the chances for physically handicapped persons to earn a living. Handicapped persons of most kinds, and in practically all degrees, can be successfully employed, even though the range of their abilities is narrow. It is most important to understand the importance of schooling as a factor in preparing young people, whether handicapped or not, for successful employment in accordance with their abilities, physical and mental.